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AN APPLICATION OF GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE
TO THE ANALYSIS OF COHERENCE IN BASIC WRITING

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

By
Linda Indahwati Abidin
March 1996


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Approved by:


Dr. Rong Chen, Chair, English


Dr. Wendy Smith


Dr. Sunny Hyon

2-15-1996

Date

ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine problems in student writing caused by incoherence and propose a set of pedagogical guidelines for addressing these problems. If we go back to the belle-lettres movement in the nineteenth century, we know that coherence, along with unity, focus, and emphasis, is not a substantially new issue in writing instruction. However, coherence and its relationship to writing has not been given as much attention as mechanical/grammatical elements. This lack of attention is most likely caused by the equivocal views of composition experts themselves in establishing the concept of coherence. It might also be due to the fact that many composition teachers have treated coherence as cohesion. My study intends to show that the two terms differ significantly, and while coherence and cohesion are related to each other, cohesion can actually contribute to coherence.

I employed the *Cooperative Principle* theory, a linguistic/pragmatic approach, to demonstrate strategies for analyzing incoherence in student writing. I selected a set of papers from a basic writing class at Riverside Community College, Riverside and analyzed the features which contributed to their lack of coherence.

From the findings, I conclude that incoherence is caused by the violations of the maxims of the *Cooperative Principle*. These violations are primarily due to students

not knowing how to discover their own ideas, failing to keep to their focus, not making their writing relevant to the topic ideas, and not organizing details adequately.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past ten years, composition theorists and rhetoricians have shifted away from a singular focus on teaching grammar to the more communicative element in writing. For example, they emphasize the need for students to learn how to read their sentences within the context of the purpose of their discourse. Students are encouraged to ask themselves what their sentences are saying and whether their messages will be clear to their audiences. In other words, the primary focus of teaching composition is now on helping students recognize how to construct and combine sentences in writing so as to convey the message they have chosen. These techniques are the basic principles in creating a piece of coherent discourse.

In coherent discourse the writer successfully communicates his message to his reader, using language not only for what it denotes, but for how it contribute to the meaning of the whole. In "Coherence, Cohesion, and Writing Quality," for example, Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley define cohesion as "... the mechanism that holds a text together, while coherence defines those underlying semantic relations that allow a text to be understood and used" (202). Jeanne Fahnestock attributes coherence as "...the quality enabling a reader to sense a flow of meaning" (400).

Although most writing teachers consider coherence an essential element of good writing, it remains difficult to

teach. They proclaim its benefits, demonstrate its effects, and provide students with good models, but many student writers keep producing incoherent texts. As Betty Bamberg points out, "...for beginning writers coherence is one of the most difficult concepts to grasp and likewise to produce in their writing" (417).

There are at least two reasons for this. First, instructional approaches for teaching coherence have not yet been fully developed, and second, many writing teachers have treated coherence as cohesion; that is, something found in texts, identifiable as grammatical or lexical features. As a result, they have emphasized, in their writing instruction, mechanical drills of certain elements, such as "transitional expressions and parallel structures" (Noguchi 102). In this thesis, I intend to show that the concepts of coherence and cohesion differ significantly. While cohesion is a textual quality which may contribute to coherence through the use of certain cohesive devices, coherence lies beyond the text. It is essentially a feature that involves the cooperation between writer and reader. By applying a linguistic/pragmatic theory, Grice's *Cooperative Maxims*, I will demonstrate that composition teachers can help students produce coherence in their writing.

This thesis will consist of four main parts. The first part is an overview of the principles of Grice's *Cooperative Maxims*. The second part offers a discussion of the nature of

and the relationships between coherence and cohesion, focusing on the ways coherence and cohesion differ from each other and how and when texts cohere and how and when they do not. The third part applies the above principles to an analysis of a set of student papers from a basic writing course at Riverside Community College to show that incoherence is caused by the violation of one or more of Grice's maxims. The last part of this thesis offers suggestions on how knowledge of the *Cooperative Principles* can help composition teachers teach coherence in writing instruction.

CHAPTER ONE

I. THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE THEORY

According to Paul Grice, when people talk, they do not normally exchange "disconnected remarks," which would be otherwise insensible. There are at least what Grice calls, "cooperative efforts," in which the participant recognizes, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes or at least a mutually accepted direction (26). Grice contends that for a conversation to take place, there are four maxims people adhere to: the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner (26). The Quantity maxim requires the participant to make his contribution as informative as is required but not more informative than is required. The maxim of Quality requires that the participant not say what he believes to be false or say that for which he lacks adequate evidence. The third maxim, Relation, requires the conversation to be relevant. And finally, the maxim of Manner is related not to what the speaker says (like the previous categories) but rather to how he says it. This maxim, thus, includes rules such as "be perspicuous," "avoid obscurity," "avoid ambiguity," "be brief," and "be orderly" (Grice 27). I will discuss each of these maxims in the following examples.

(1) A: When are you going to be back for dinner?

B: Sometime tonight.

or (2) A: Where does Mrs. Johnson live now?

B: Somewhere in the South of France (Grice 32).

B's answers in the two examples above are less informative than what A expected. So, B's answers are an infringement of the first maxim, Quantity. We could infer that from the first example above that B is holding back some information from A by not giving a clear and straight answer to A. However, in example (2) B may also imply that he honestly does not know exactly where Mrs. Johnson lives and the most informative contribution he can give to A. So, his answer in example (2) might not be a violation of the Quantity maxim. Let us now take a look at an example of the Quality maxim.

(3) C: How do you like my new hair-do?

D: Oh, you look nice!

In this example, if the truth is that C's new hair-do is nice, then there is no violation of the maxim of Quality. However, if C's hair-do is not as what C commented, then D has violated the Quality maxim, "Do not say what you believe to be false." According to Grice, other features that can also contribute to the violation of the maxim of Quality are irony, metaphor, and hyperbole (34). The following is an example of the Relation maxim.

(4) Elaine: Mrs. X is an old bag?

Susan: The weather has been quite delightful this summer.

Susan's answer is clearly a violation of the maxim of Relation, which holds a speaker to "Be relevant." Susan may be implying to Elaine that she does not want to get into the topic of conversation that Elaine just brought up. It seems that Susan has blatantly refused to make what she says a relevant response to Elaine's preceding remark. Susan thereby implies that Elaine's remark should not be discussed and that, perhaps, suggests that Elaine's remark is socially inappropriate (Grice 35).

Now let us discuss the last maxim, Manner. When a discourse carried produces uncertainty or vagueness, the violation of the maxim of Manner, ambiguity, occurs. As Grice reminds us, we are concerned only with ambiguity that is deliberately created by the speaker to avoid telling the truth (35), and thereby, the speaker expects that his intention to be recognized by his hearer. This is clear from the example below.

Anne: When are you going back for dinner?

Bill: Sometime tonight.

Ann expects Bill to tell her an exact time when he will be back tonight for she thinks that they are having dinner together and that she wants to prepare for it. However, Bill's answer clearly indicates that he does not want to tell Anne when he is going be back for sure. He intentionally eludes telling her the truth, and his answer causes ambiguity in that it is not clear, indefinite, and

puzzling to A. The second type of the violation of Manner is obscurity. Grice explains that if the Cooperative Principle is to operate, the speaker will intend to make the listener understand what the speaker is saying in spite of the occurrence of obscurity in the speaker's utterance (36). For example, Mr. and Mrs. Landon are having a conversation about a subject that they think their children need not know about. Then suddenly Lisa, their daughter, comes in and joins the conversation. Mr. Landon will then try to deliberately obscure the conversation so that his daughter will not understand what they are talking about (though not so obscure that his wife can still understand) (37).

(5) Mrs. Landon: So tell me about the concert you went to. I heard that it was Marianne's first live performance? How did she sing?

(Lisa enters the room where her parents are talking) Mr. Landon: She produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score of "Home Sweet Home." (Grice 37)

So far we have discussed the violations of the four maxims of the *Cooperative Principle*. In sum, it is very important for a piece of discourse to be able to flow smoothly, successfully, and effectively in order that it not violate the rules of "cooperation." Otherwise, a misunderstanding or even a breakdown of communication can easily occur. This is true in spoken as well as written

communication, and to prove this point I will apply these basic "cooperative principles" in the analysis of student writing, in chapter three. But before that let us turn our discussion to the basic principles of coherence and cohesion in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Pedagogical interest in coherence may have had its roots in the nineteenth century as we go back to Alexander Bain's first rule of paragraphing: "The bearing of each sentence upon what precedes shall be explicit and unmistakable" (Bain 413). By the end of the nineteenth century, coherence, along with unity and emphasis, was an established canon of paragraph structure. However, today, the traditional view of coherence as introduced by Bain has been increasingly challenged by composition theorists as well as linguists. For example, Betty Bamberg argues that the concept of coherence defined by Bain is "too limited" and it treats coherence as a phenomenon somewhat similar to what many linguists and rhetoricians refer to as cohesion (418). Bamberg further contends that, although cohesive ties are parts that make a text coherent, the ties are not by themselves sufficient to create coherent text (418). McCrimmon in Writing with a Purpose, one of the most widely known freshman composition texts, writes that "A paragraph is coherent when the reader can move easily from one sentence to the next and read the paragraph as an integrated whole, rather than a series of separate sentences" (108). In this chapter, I will deal with the nature of cohesion and coherence and their relationships to find out how and when texts cohere and how and when they do not. I will start by discussing cohesion.

II.1. COHESION.

There are two types of cohesion: grammatical and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion is attained through the use of cohesive devices or ties, which link sentences but do not necessarily add new semantic information. Lexical cohesion refers to the semantic relationships created by specific lexical items. I will discuss the grammatical cohesion first.

II.1.a. Grammatical Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan have identified three types of grammatical cohesive ties--reference, substitution, and ellipsis--each of which allows writers to link ideas within and between sentences (4).

Reference ties create cohesion by replacing or referring back to previously used words. The most common reference ties are pronouns, comparatives, demonstratives, and definite articles. For example, in the following example, the pronouns "he" and "them" refer to the "boy" and "cars" respectively (308).

- 1) The boy loved cars. *He* dreamed about *them* night and day.

The second example illustrates the use of demonstratives to link the first and second sentence.

- 2) Unfortunately, he was never satisfied with a car for a long time. *This* meant he was always in debt.

In the first and second examples, the cohesive ties do not add to the information contained in the previous sentences, but simply replace specific words or clauses that have already been used. In effect, personal pronouns and demonstratives fill a syntactic slot that could have been filled by what they refer to. In the third example, the use of a cohesive tie, comparative, contains semantic information (310).

- 3) The first car he owned was an old sedan. It was not in good condition, but he said to himself that it was *better* than no car at all.

Thus in (3), the interpretation of the comparative *better* depends on the information contained in the previous sentence, specifically, "he owned an old car." Comparatives can be interpreted only in relationship to some previously identified object or concept--there must be something to compare. However, the comparative does not simply replace a previously used word; it adds meaning by defining one thing in relationship to another (312).

In example (4), the definite article *the* precedes a noun which we assume to be interpretable on the basis of already known information, in this case, *he has bought cars*.

- 4) A car is parked outside. Inside *the* car sit two people.

The definite article in the above sentence indicates that the car identified is among those mentioned in the previous sentence. Definite articles thus convey semantic information that communicates that the noun they precede is one which is specific and identifiable (313).

Substitution involves the replacement of one item with another, with the restriction that no semantic information is added. Halliday and Hasan explain that "a substitute is a sort of counter which is used in place of the repetition of a particular item" (89). Thus, since the substitute, like a personal pronoun, is used instead of repetition, it must be semantically neutral--that is, it must be able to fill the same grammatical slot in the sentence without adding to or subtracting from the meaning of the item for which it substitutes. In (4.i), one substitutes for car in the previous sentence.

- (4) (i) He decided to buy a new car. His old one was too unreliable.
- (ii) "I know what kind he will buy. Do you?"
- (iii) "Do you think he wants an import?" "I think so."

Most of the cohesive ties we have discussed thus far involve reference to or the replacement of nouns, but (4.ii-iii) illustrate that cohesion can be attained with verb and clausal substitutes. In (4.ii), *do* substitutes for *know*, or

more accurately, for the predicate of the first sentence. In (4.iii), *so* substitutes for the clause *he wants an import*.

Ellipsis, according to Halliday and Hasan, is similar to substitution, and they refer to it as "substitution by zero" (142), suggesting, as I shall demonstrate, that ellipsis involves a deletion of a word, phrase, or clause without the replacement of the deleted structure by another. Witte and Faigley, in their discussion of Halliday and Hasan's work, note that substitution and ellipsis create cohesion by "extend(ing) the textual or semantic domain of one sentence to a subsequent sentence" (190). This means that cohesion occurs because the meaning of the first sentence in a pair determines the interpretation of the second sentence in which substitution or ellipsis is used. As in substitution, there can be nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis. We will take a look at one illustration in (5) to serve for all.

- (5) Is he really going to buy another car? He owns three now.

The **ellipsis** is obvious: the word *car*, rather than being repeated (in plural form, as this example would require), is simply deleted. The hearer or reader of these sentences will understand, however, that *three* refers to *cars*. Now let us turn our discussion to lexical cohesion.

II.1.b. Lexical Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan explain that there are two types of lexical cohesion: reiteration and collocation. **Reiteration** is a phenomenon in which one lexical item refers back to another to which it is related by having a common referent, which can be an exact repetition of an item, or through the use of "synonyms," or "near synonyms" (278). **Collocation**, on the other hand, refers to the co-occurrence of words that we recognize as sharing lexical and semantic features; that is, words that "go together" such as night and day, school and teacher, and so on (286). Let us illustrate both types of lexical cohesion with the examples below.

The simplest form of reiteration is the exact repetition of a word. In (6), the repetition of the word *car* creates cohesion between the two sentences.

(6) John's car gets twenty-two miles per gallon.

That's almost as much as my car gets.

However, (6) also illustrates another feature of **reiteration**, one that helps distinguish it from **reference**. This is the repetition of the word that has no reference at all to the word repeated. As Halliday and Hasan assert, "It is not necessary for two lexical occurrences to have the same referent ... in order for them to be cohesive" (282). Thus, while a pronoun such as *it* refers to the identical item it replaces, *car* in the second sentence of (6) does not mean the same car referred to in the first sentence. It is

simply the co-occurrence of the words that brings about cohesion.

Synonyms and near synonyms create cohesion in the same way as repetition. For example, in (7.1), *automobile* and *car* are cohesive. (7) (i) The *automobile* has a profound impact on our society.

The *car* has changed the way we live, work, and play.

The next example, (7) (ii), illustrates the cohesive effects of hyponym, a term that is used to include the word it refers to, such as *vehicle* for *car*.

(7) (ii) *Cars* enable us to go from where we want when we want.

These *vehicles* have added to our personal freedom.

The second type of lexical cohesion is collocation. **Collocation** is a term used to account for "all lexical cohesion that is not covered by what we have called reiteration" (Halliday and Hasan 288). It includes the use of antonyms (8.i) and (8.ii) as well as the use of words from the same semantic field (8.iii) and (8.iv).

(8) (i) The *boys* wanted to play baseball. The *girls* wanted to play soccer.

(ii) Jane *loves* hiking in the winter. John *hates* to be outdoors when it is cold.

(iii) On *Tuesday* the report must be finished. We need it for the meeting on *Wednesday*.

(iv) I am feeling *ill*. I think I will call the *doctor*.

It is easy to discover the semantic features that account for the cohesion. For example, in (8.i), *boys* and *girls* share features (such as +physical object, +animate, +human, -adult) and differ only in the feature of sex (male vs. female). In (8.ii), the antonym of love, hate, is clearly presented, and in (8.iii), the scripts for *Tuesday* and *Wednesday* both contain information about days of the week, and this information shares a similar semantic field, which contributes to the cohesiveness of (8.iii). The fact that the script for *doctor* includes the notion of someone who *treats disease* provides the semantic link with the word *ill*. So, scripts create lexical cohesiveness especially when the shared semantic features of the lexical items are not obvious. Let us now turn our discussion to coherence.

II.2. COHERENCE

The term coherence has been vaguely referred to in most composition texts as a quality of a text which helps to establish unity. Many researchers in composition interested in coherence have attempted to identify the features of paragraphs that make them coherent, focusing primarily on

structural patterns such as "coordination and subordination" (Christensen 145) and "intersential links" (Winterowd 226), in which the term coherence and form are used synonymously. All of this work on coherence shares two features. First, it treats coherence as something found in texts, identifiable as grammatical, lexical, or semantic features, thus as cohesion. Second, although the researchers of coherence limit their work to the paragraph, all suggest that what they propose about coherence in paragraph holds true for longer texts and whole discourses.

The view that coherence is a textual quality ignores the fact that a coherent discourse is one that is consistent in content, purpose, voice, and style. More important, coherence is determined as much by a reader's perception of a text as it is by a writer's intention or by the text itself. Fahnestock calls coherence "the quality enabling a reader to sense a 'flow' of meaning" (400). Bamberg (420) and Witte and Faigley (201) point out that coherence is both textual and extratextual in that it depends both on textual clues and on the ability of readers "to draw on their own knowledge and expectations to bridge gaps and to fill in assumed information." Thus, coherence is a feature of the whole communication process and involves the writer, the subject, the text, and the reader.

The recognition that coherence has extratextual features has made it possible to distinguish between

coherence and cohesion. Until fairly recently, the terms were used interchangeably. For instance, Winterowd recently acknowledged, in "The Grammar of Coherence," that many composition experts fail to distinguish between cohesion and coherence and specified that he "was talking about the grammar of cohesion, not coherence" (828). Winterowd admits confusion of the two terms and that coherence and cohesion have only recently been differentiated from one another. Witte and Faigley also explain the distinction as follows, "Cohesion defines those mechanisms that hold a text together, while coherence defines those underlying semantic relations that allow a text to be understood and used" (202). Among the "mechanisms that hold a text together" are conjunctions of all kinds, including conjunctive adverbs, pronouns, and the words and phrases typically called transitions (such as first, second, etc), as well as parallelism, the repetition of words, and the use of words that are typically associated with each other, including synonyms, near synonyms, antonyms, and hyponym (203). To illustrate the difference between coherence and cohesion, we can examine (9) from Witte and Faigley (201).

- 9) The quarterback threw the ball toward the end. Balls are used in many sports. Most balls are spheres, but a football is an ellipsoid. The tight end leaped to catch the ball.

These sentences are cohesive because one sentence is semantically related to the other through repetitions of the words of previous sentences. For example, the word "ball" appears in each sentence; the words "quarterback" and "tight end" in the first sentence linked semantically to the word "sports" in the second sentence and the word "football" in the third. The words "threw" in the first sentence and "caught" in the fourth create a cohesive link between two sentences. These cohesive devices give us the idea that each sentence is related to the other. However, the whole paragraph does not comprise a coherent text. This series of sentences all together does not give us a sense of meaning although they make sense by themselves or by isolation. According to Witte and Faigley, the first and fourth sentences seem to belong together because they describe a complete action, but the second and third sentences do not seem part of the same world (202). The above examples then prove to us that the cohesion of a text does not assure its coherence.

The following is another example of a paragraph which has cohesion but not coherence.

- 10) My car is black. Black English was a controversial subject in the sentences. At seventy most people have retired. To retire means "to put new tires on a vehicle." Some vehicles such as hovercraft

have no wheels. Wheels go round (Connor and Johns 12).

In (10), the sentences are all right in isolation, but their links fail to connect. We cannot produce a summary of 10) because the sentences do not add up to a consistent world picture. Let us look at example (11), which contains of a set of cohesive sentences, yet incoherent.

11) Susie left the howling ice cube in a bitter bicycle and it melted. It soon tinkled merrily in her martini. Into her drink she then also poured the grand piano she had boiled in a textbook of mathematics the night before. She chewed the martini, read the olive and went to bed. But first she took her clothes off. She then took her clothes off (Connor and Johns 12).

The problem in (11) is anomaly; that is, the sentences are syntactically correct but not semantically. This means that we cannot make sense of the sentences at all. Let us take one more example.

12) The net bulged with the lightning shot. The referee blew his whistle and signaled. Smith had been offside. The two captains both muttered something. The goalkeeper sighed for relief (Connor and Johns 12).

In (12), the sentences are coherent but yet not cohesive. The sentences lack connectivity; however, it is

not difficult for a soccer-wise reader to interpret the meaning of the whole paragraph. We can summarize (12) as a report on a situation in a soccer game, a goal disallowed by the referee, or an offside goal. (10) and (11) will intractably resist such summarizing, whereas (12) is interpretable in a way that (10) and (11) are not. The difference between (10) and (11) on the one hand and (12) on the other is that whereas in (12) we can make connection with our experience or make a scenario around it, we cannot do so in (10) and (11).

According to Connor and Johns, our understanding or interpretation of coherence is "a hermeneutic phenomenon." That is for a text to be coherent, although not necessarily cohesive, the reader must be able to "build up a world-picture around it." On the other hand, a text is incoherent when the reader is not able to relate his experience to the text, make sense of it, or "build up a plausible scenario around it" (Connor and Johns 13).

We have seen that cohesion contributes to coherence but its presence does not necessarily guarantee coherence. Having knowledge of cohesion alone does not guarantee the ability to write a piece of coherent discourse. Students who can write a cohesive text do not necessarily and automatically write coherent discourse as well. Incoherent texts definitely pose a more serious and complex problem than non-cohesive texts because they normally fail to

communicate with their readers; on the other hand, incohesive texts do not necessarily produce incoherent discourse. I will illustrate this point with the example below from Walter Farley, The Black Stallion, p. 199.

- (13) The following days were unlike any that had gone before. There wasn't a man on the ranch who didn't know of Saturday's race and the conditions under which it would be run. They gave any excuses to get near the black stallion's corral. (Farley, 199)

The text above may be coherent depending on the reader's prior experience and knowledge of the story or the plots of the story although there are no cohesive ties that apparently link one sentence to the other. We can now say that a sense of coherence is established in the mind of the reader as he is able to process the information from the text by relating the text with the knowledge that he possesses of the world. And the relatedness that is perceived by the reader may or may not be signaled by the explicit presence of discourse markers or other cohesive devices in the text (Connor and John 115).

The next three examples show that incoherence can also be attributed to irrelevant information-a violation of the Relation maxim-and to insufficient information or unnecessary detailed information, a violation of the Quantity maxim. Let us consider example (9) again.

- (9) The quarterback threw the ball toward the end. Balls are used in many sports. Most balls are spheres, but a football is an ellipsoid. The tight end leaped to catch the ball.

In this example, the first sentence, "The quarterback threw the ball toward the end," is followed by "Balls are used in many sports." The two sentences have a neither relevant nor related subject matter: one being the football game, the other being the use of balls in sports. The subject of the third sentence is about the shape of balls, whereas the fourth sentence is about the football game. The paragraph is incoherent because it contains two unrelated topic ideas. This is a violation of the maxim of Relation, be Relevant. Now let us compare the next examples (17) and (18) taken from Raskin and Weiser (215).

- (17) Next winter I am going to Florida. I hate shoveling snow.

The *Cooperative Principle* holds that readers make an effort to interpret texts and requires them to make a number of inferences about the writer's intention (Grice 26). In example (17) the reader must make an inference that some relationship exists between the writer's hatred of shoveling snow and his going to Florida next winter. From that point, the reader must infer several things: it snows in the winter where the writer resides, the writer must shovel the snow, and it is not necessary to shovel snow in winter in Florida.

Although the words *winter*, *Florida*, *shoveling*, and *snow* contain the necessary information, readers may not be willing to do this much work of interpreting. For effective communication to take place, the writer must not place too much of the interpretative burden on the reader by forcing the reader to make all of the inferences necessary to understand the discourse (Grice 26).

One can argue, however, that the sentence in example (17) is sufficiently informative, given the fact that there is snow in the place where he lives so that he can easily infer and relate to what the writer complains--having to shovel snow. On the contrary, somebody who lives in the tropical climate may not be able to relate or understand this problem, and therefore, may question what the relationship is between "Next winter I am going to Florida" and "I hate shoveling snow." Let us look at example (18).

(18) Winter brings much snow here. In order to make the pavements and driveways passable one has to shovel snow all the time. I hate doing so, so I am going to spend the next winter in Florida instead of here. The climate is warmer in Florida, and one does not expect snow at all there, or at least as much as is here, in winter. Therefore, it is likely that I will be able to avoid shoveling snow in Florida and thus save myself from doing something I don't like doing. (216)

Discourse such as (18), on the other hand, provides information that the reader could easily infer. The second sentence in (18), for example, is probably unnecessary for any reader familiar with tasks related to snow, and the fourth and the fifth sentences contain information easily inferable from the third sentence. Even the phrase *instead of here* at the end of the third sentence can be inferred from what precedes because if the writer did not mean that Florida was a place other than where he already was, he would not have named it. Instead, he would have written: "I am going to spend next winter *here*." To say *Florida* if he were already in Florida would be a violation of the maxims of Quantity. Readers would be able to understand (18) easily, but would probably find it overly detailed and not as coherent as it might be because readers expect to make some inferences as they read (216). However, for somebody who does not know about the climate in Florida as well as living in the snowy climate, the discourse (18) would not probably be overdetailed; and therefore, such readers would find the text coherent. Let us take a look at the following example.

(19) There has been so much snow lately. I have been shoveling it all the time, and I don't like doing that. Next winter I am going to Florida. (216)

The example (19) begins with an essential piece of information missing from (17): there is a lot of snow where

the writer resides. But unlike (18), (19) does not bother to explain that the snow occurs in winter since that can be inferred from the script for the word *snow*. Nor does (19) include the obvious information that a great amount of snow demands that pavements be shoveled. All three passages explain that the writer dislikes shoveling snow, but (17) fails to make explicit the fact that the writer lives where there is snow. All three passages also explain that the writer intends to spend the following winter in Florida, but (19) avoids the unnecessary details of (18) by allowing the reader to infer the information in the last two sentences about the climate of Florida and the writer's expectations that he will be able to avoid shoveling snow in Florida. Thus, we can say that in general readers would find that (19) is a more coherent text than either (17) and (18) because it provides readers with information which is neither overwhelming nor inadequate. In other words, it obviously illustrates the first maxim of the *Cooperative Principle*, Quantity (217). I have discussed Grice's *Cooperative Principle* in chapter one and coherence and cohesion in chapter two. In the next chapter I will explain the methodology of data collection.

CHAPTER THREE

SUBJECTS AND METHODOLOGY

In this research I collected data from essays of a basic writing course at Riverside Community College. First of all, essays which had been graded, ranging from "D's" to "F's," were collected from papers of thirty-five students (non-ESL students) in one semester period (these students were asked to identify their native languages). Then, four native speakers read, looked for, and identified coherence problems in the papers. The readers were two graduate students in Composition (from California State University, San Bernardino and Fullerton), who have had a minimum of two years of tutoring or part time teaching a basic writing class and two composition teachers from Riverside Community College, who have taught writing for more than five years. To help the readers identify coherence problems, I gave them a set of guidelines explaining what to focus in terms of coherence. If the essays did not meet the criteria in the guidelines, they were to mark, underline, or give comments. Following is the guidelines that the readers had to look for when reading the essays.

1. Sufficient information to support ideas--not too little, not overwhelming.
2. Clarity. Papers should make their points effectively so that readers should have no difficulty interpreting ideas.

3. Relevance. Supporting ideas should be relevant to the topic ideas.

4. Consistency in content, style, voice, and purpose.

Readers were told that they may mark with circles, brackets, and quotations or underline words, sentences, or paragraphs that they have difficulties interpreting. They could also make short comments on those problem sentences or paragraphs. Samples of the readers' comments are as follows, "No sense" or "Sense," "Awkward," "Meaning Unclear or "Unclear," "Redundant," "Repetitious," "Ideas Unconnected," "Clarity Problem," "Inconsistency of Voice," "Thesis and Content of the Essay are Unconnected," "Ideas do not Come Across," "Irrelevant Ideas."

Each of the essays that received more than two marks or comments would be pulled out--there were seven essays which had the most marks or comments. I then analyzed segments of the essays in which there was an agreement as to coherence problems as marked by the four readers. These segments were then marked in bold or underlined.

The seven essays selected consisted of five different assignment topics. Following are descriptions of the assignments.

The assignment on the first essay ("Family Ties) was illustration with examples:

"Write a composition in which you recount something that you yourself experienced: how this incident has changed your life or your way of thinking about something, using two or three examples to illustrate your point" (Students were to refer page 9 of their text book, Copy/ Write Basic Writing Through Controlled Composition for a model essay). (Gorrell, 9)

The assignment on the second essay ("Troubles of an Old Car. Pleasures of a New One") was **comparison and contrast**:

"Write a composition in which you compare two aspects of the same subject. Then show how those two things differ or how two aspects of one thing differ. Your composition will cover first one aspect of your subject and then the other. Write an introductory and a conclusion that tie the two aspects together and make your point" (For model essays, students were required to refer to their text book, Copy/Write Basic Writing Through Controlled Composition, page 31 and 32). (Gorrell, 32)

The assignment on the third essay ("Moving Out") was **argumentation or persuasion** :

"Write a composition in which you try to argue your point or decision. Support your argument with

logical reasoning or facts. You may also write a persuasion essay in which you try to persuade someone of your viewpoint on a given subject. If you choose to write an argumentation or persuasion, then first choose something that you have an opinion about. Second, decide on a specific reader as your audience. And then think about what you can say that might convince that person (Students could refer to Copy/Write Basic Writing Through Controlled Composition, page 44). (Gorrell, 44)

The assignment on the fourth and fifth essays ("Tacos" and "Enchiladas") was **sensory descriptions** :

"Write a composition of your own, describing your favorite food and using as many of your senses as you can--sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste--to show someone else why it's your favorite" (For model essays students should turn to page 22 of their text book, Copy/Write Basic Writing through Controlled Composition. (Gorrell 22)

The assignment on the fifth and sixth essays was **analysis of personality traits of one of the characters in the novel, Great Expectations**:

"Write an analysis of one personality trait in the novel, Great Expectations by Charles Dickens and support your analysis with clear description of

your chosen character. Your analysis should be at least two pages and double-spaced."

In the following chapter, I will analyze segments of the seven essays selected as they appear here in bold or underlined to find out if incoherence in the papers was caused by violating the maxims of the *Cooperative Principle*. Words, sentences, or paragraphs in bold mean they are irrelevant to the topic ideas or purposes of the essays. Words, sentences, or paragraphs underlined mean they do not make any sense or are unclear (grammatical/mechanical problems will not be discussed in this analysis).

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT WRITING

In this essay, the assignment was on illustration with examples.

(1): **Family Ties**

Having to move with your family from the loss of work can change how a person deals with moving later in life. Moving to a new locations due to the economy can be helpful to a person when they are moving.

When I was almost five years old, my family and I moved from Lacom, Oregon to Anaheim, California, in search of work for my father. The reason for my father's loss of his job was that the paper mill had to close. The paper mill closed because the government wanted to protect the spotted owl from becoming an endangered species, which closed the saw mill and caused the paper mill to close.

My father became tired of the city and the drug busts at the metal factory in Anaheim. So, we left for a more urban place to live and we found Lake Elsinore a more suitable place to live. For one year in the transition

of moving, we drove into into Anaheim and spent little of our time in Lake Elsinore. I went with my parents because I was finishing second grade at Besty Ross Elementary School.

Someday I will move again to live with my spouse.

Moving has helped me adjust to the changes of a new environment. Bestpart about moving is that it is done through a family that moves together.

In the essay above several aspects contribute to incoherence, caused primarily by violations of the maxims of Manner, Quantity, and Relation. I will begin with the violation of the maxim of Manner.

The maxim of Manner requires that the writer communicate his message to the reader in a clear way. In this essay incomplete information prevents readers from making sense of the text. The topic idea is not clear: is it "moving together creates family ties" or "family ties are strengthened through moving together?" The whole passage gives us details about the events of moving and the causes of moving. However, it does not reveal what the writer has gained from his moving together with his family; for example, how the moving has affected his life later on, or what experience or lessons he learns from moving together with his family, or how moving with the family helps

strengthen family ties. What we find is a list of events about moving from one place to another.

Numerous details that are not relevant to the topic idea are listed throughout the whole essay. Thus, the writer has violated the maxim of Relation, be relevant, since he gives a list of unrelated and irrelevant details which are not pertinent to the topic idea. For example, in the third, fourth, and fifth paragraphs the writer lists events of his family's moving from one town to another and the reason for moving, the changing of jobs, and the schools he and his brother go to now. However, none of the paragraphs depicts how the family sticks together during the process of moving or how the moving reflects a close bond among them. This is a violation of the maxim of Relation.

The last paragraph contains propositions that are not supported. "Moving has helped me adjust to the changes of a new environment" and "The best part about moving is that it is done through a family that moves together" are propositions that are not supported with evidence. There is not even information that we can infer about these two statements throughout the entire passage. This is a violation of the maxim of Quantity because the writer provides insufficient information for the readers to be able to understand the text.

In the following essay, the assignment was comparison/contrast.

(2):

Troubles of an Old Car

Pleasures of a New One

My cars, the trouble that my old one gave me, and the pleasures the new one that I just bought gives me.

It started about three months ago, when the old car my dad gave me, blew a head gasket. I didn't have a car for about two and one half months. Finally, I decided to buy a new car. At first, I was very hesitant of buying a new car because this would be my first time making payments. For the first month, I car shopped. It seemed to be fun first, looking and test driving, all the great new cars.

When it came to talking and making a deal with the car salesman, they really gave me the runaround. I thought that it would be easy to buy a car, but I was wrong. I went to about ten different dealers, and each one would not work with us. I was getting very frustrated with the whole situation. I didn't want to buy a car anymore. Then one weekend my mom, dad, boyfriend and I all went to look some more to see if I could get the car that I wanted. Again I was disappointed and very upset because I thought I was going to get a car. I realized I wasn't getting a car. Therefore, I told my

mom and dad that I just wanted to go home. I didn't want a car anymore. Finally my dad suggested that we go to the Riverside Auto Center and see if we could find something that I would like. At that point, I didn't care because I thought that I wasn't going to get a car. So I said "What the hell we're already out here." So as we got out of my parents car, there it was my future car.

At that point, I had a good feeling that I was going to drive away in that car. I didn't know what kind of car it was, who made it, or the price of it. I just knew that I had to have this car. I noticed that it was a Hyundai and the price was in my range. It was a brand new nineteen-ninety five Hyundai Accent, a new line of cars that Hyundai had just brought out. I was the first person to buy one.

When I compare my new car to my old one, I am able to depend on it to go places and don't have to worry about breaking down. I get a lot of pleasure from it.

The writer's topic idea, as we can understand from the first sentence of the first paragraph, is the troubles his old car gave him and the pleasures he got from his new one.

I will analyze certain aspects that contribute to incoherence of the essay.

First of all, the essay demonstrates two violations of the Quantity and Relation maxims. I will start with the first violation. The first paragraph is only a repetition of the title. Then, the second, third, and fourth paragraphs give repetitious information. Reading the title, "Troubles of an Old Car Pleasures of a New One," we expect the writer to provide information about his old car as well his new one. However, he only briefly explains the trouble with his old car in one sentence in the first paragraph. This is clearly a violation of the Quantity maxim since the information he provides about his old car is too little.

In the last paragraph, the writer merely points out that he is able to depend on his new car, but he neither explains how dependable his new car is nor the pleasures he gets from it. This is another violation of the Quantity maxim--the writer provides the reader with insufficient information.

The essay also violates the maxim of Relation. The violation of the Relation maxim, be relevant, occurs when the writing is off the subject. The writer discusses an irrelevant subject matter rather than what he is supposed to describe: comparison and contrast of his old and new cars. The writer in this case has violated the maxim of Relation because instead of showing us the way his old car troubled

him and the pleasures he gets from his new car, he describes the hassle and the nuisance he has to go through in finding or buying a new car.

To summarize, the essay is incoherent because the majority of the comments are not relevant to the topic idea; or in other words, the comments are inconsistent with the purpose: comparing and contrasting an old car with a new one: the troubles of an old car vs. pleasures of a new one. In addition, this essay contains insufficient information about the subject that it is supposed to deal with.

In the following essay, the assignment was argumentation, supported by reasons or evidence.

(3)

Moving Out

Recently I was faced with the question, should I move out?

At first the answer was no, but since then I have changed my mind. Moving out means getting a job, for I need one anyways to support the new addition to my family.

Amber, my girlfriend, and the reason I'm deciding to move out, said, " I'm going to move out in six months." She is only moving out because of the baby, which I am

fifty percent responsible for. So I should move out with her and give her as much support as I can.

Even though we will both move back in with our parents it will be fun living on our own.

Several aspects contribute to the incoherence in the essay. In the first paragraph, which consists of only one sentence, the writer says that he has to move out, but he does not give us any information about the situation he is in now: where he is living now or why he must move out (we do not know this until the last two paragraphs). This is a violation of the first maxim, Quantity, because the writer provides the reader with insufficient information about his situation, forcing the reader to guess what happened to him.

In the second paragraph the writer tells us that he has changed his mind and that he is now willing to move out. He does not, however, tell us why he at first did not want to move out. This is another violation of the Quantity maxim because the writer has not provided enough information for the reader to be able to follow the train of thought.

In the last paragraph the writer tells us about his intention to move back in with his parents but does not state his reason for it. There is not enough information anywhere in the essay for us to determine why he will move back in with his parents. Although the previous paragraph

tells us about his reason for moving out (both he and his girl friend have to take care of their baby), there is no explanation about why he decides to move back in with his parents. This causes another violation of the maxim of Quantity because when a writer makes a statement without providing sufficient information to support or explain it, the reader is faced with the inconvenience of having to guess. This lack of information thus makes the paper incoherent.

In summary, the writer does not give us enough information to understand his predicament. Since the assignment is argumentation, the writer needs to make his situation clear and give the reader sufficient information to support his propositions ie., moving out and moving back in with his parents. His argument never gets off the ground because he has not provided readers with necessary information about his situation or any reasons to support his proposition. This essay is an example of a "writer based prose" (Linda Flower 35), consisting of merely personal information, which is however, inaccessible for the reader. This creates too much of the burden of interpretation on the reader.

In the following assignment, examples (4) and (5), students were asked to describe their favorite food and show how it appeals to their senses.

(4)

Tacos

Tacos are my favorite food. Whenever I eat Taco it never has the same taste as the Taco before it. First of all, I prefer an authentic Taco as opposed to a fast food Taco. My Taco needs to have a crunchy shell. If the Taco is made with the already made shell, it loses my interest. I show my appreciation towards my favorite food by admiring its qualities. I look slow. The fresh leaf lettuce, steamy shredded beef, and the finely graded cheese.

The anticipation of eating is about to be fulfilled. I add some hot and spicy salsa before eating the Taco. I raise the crisp morsel and bring it closer to my mouth. The aroma hits me and I fall into a never ending ecstasy. My teeth break into the shell of my Taco. The salsa then drips onto my tongue, and unleashes an overwhelming urge of satisfaction.

The warm beef, cool leaf lettuce, and fresh cheese leaves me with a full stomach. At this time, I feel selfish about eating such a gratifying meal. The Taco makes me wonder when my next Taco encounter will be. Finally, the time for good food arrives. My favorite food will always be a Taco.

The first and second paragraphs of the essay above effectively describe the sense of smell, sight, and taste. They are thus relevant and are consistent with the purpose of the paper, which means they have fulfilled the requirement of the Relation maxim--be Relevant. As I pointed out earlier in chapter two, a coherent discourse is one that is consistent in content, purpose, voice, and style. In addition, the first and second paragraphs also fulfill the requirement of the maxim of Quantity up to this point since the information provided so far in the first and second paragraphs is sufficient to convey the message the writer wants; that is, how his favorite food, tacos, appeals to his senses. There are some coherence problems, however, in the third paragraph.

The third paragraph shows some incoherent aspects because there are at least two violations of the maxims, Quantity and Manner. In the sentence, "At this time, I feel selfish about eating such a gratifying meal," the writer does not give sufficient information for the reader to be able to infer what he means. In other words, he gives a proposition without giving supported evidence. It is not clear why he feels selfish. This is a violation of the maxim of Quantity: make your contribution as informative as required.

Jeanne Fahnestock asserts that coherence is "... the quality enabling a reader to sense a flow of meaning" (400).

With this in mind, now let us look at the second sentence of the third paragraph: "At this time I feel selfish about eating such a gratifying meal," followed by the third, fourth, and fifth sentences which are neither related to each other nor relevant to the topic idea: "The taco makes me wonder when my next taco encounter will be" and "Finally, the time for good food arrives" on the one hand and "My favorite food will always be a taco" on the other hand." I consider these sentences incoherent because combined altogether they neither support each other nor do they create a wholeness in meaning. We can call this a violation of the maxim of Relation since sentences are irrelevant when their presence does not imply logical and precise bearing to the subject matter, as in the case of the last four sentences of the third paragraph.

(5)

Enchilada

My favorite food to eat is enchiladas. Every Cinco de Mayo my mother prepares delicious enchiladas.

As soon as I smell the hot red sauce and onions, my eyes begin to water. When my mother put two warm enchiladas on my plate, my mouth begins to open, ready to feel a crunchy sound from the onions. I put extra cheese to add more flavor and to make it extra soft.

First, I take a bite, then I feel that my mouth is on fire. That's why I love enchiladas, I love to burn my tongue!

In this assignment the writer is expected to tell the readers about how a certain kind of food has an appeal to his senses. Although short, the essay is able to convey how the writer feels about his favorite food. This fulfills the requirement of the first maxim of the Cooperative Principle, Quantity maxim, in that the writer provides information sufficient to support his point. In describing how the food, enchilada, appeals to his sight and smell, the writer also fulfills the maxim of Relation, in which ideas are relevant to the topic idea or the purpose of the paper--how your favorite food appeals to your senses. However, there is a minor incoherence problem in this essay; the writer seems to confuse the senses of sound and taste.

In the second paragraph the writer seems to describe how the food, enchiladas, appeals to his sight in "As soon as I smell the hot red sauce (sauce) and onions, my eyes begins (begin) to water." It also appeals to his taste as he explains, "When my mother put two warm enchiladas on my plate, my mouth begins to open ready to feel a crunchy sound from the onions." However, the second sentence is illogical since the writer seems to suggest that the mouth can actually feel "a crunchy sound." It is sufficient to say

"...my mouth begins to open ready to enjoy the crunchy onions" or "... my mouth begins to open ready to taste the crunchy onions." This is a violation of the maxim of Manner, "avoid obscurity," since the expression, "...my mouth begins to open ready to feel a crunchy sound..." is a fallacy, which can create reader confusion because a mouth enjoys a taste and does not feel the sound, but ears hear the sound.

In the following assignment, examples (6) and (7), the students were asked to analyze the personality of one of the characters in the novel Great Expectations.

(6)

Great Expectations

In the novel "Great Expectations" Pip becomes the most well known character. The plot of the story revolves around Pip and his great expectations. He becomes a protagonist during the story to become a gentlemen.

In the beginning Pip is living with his sister and her husband Joe since the rest of his family is descced. From the start he confronts trouble when he runs into the "convict" in the cemetery. As time goes on Pip is given the chance to become a gentlemen and he takes up the offer to appease Estella. He wants to show her he is more than common.

As he is achieving his goals he becomes selfish and inconsiderate. He hurts his close friends and takes part in an illegal act. As he realizes that Magwitch is the benefactor his hopes start to drop. He not only helps him hide out but starts to realize what Pride is. He realizes that becoming a gentlemen can't fill you as a whole. With pain in his heart of losing Estella to Drummle, Pip comes around the way of thinking that money can't buy happiness.

When Pip finally reaches his expectations he no longer has his true friends, Estella and happiness, he becomes lonely. He returns to make a new goal of becoming a happy person for himself. In the closure we see Pip content with himself not only on the outside, but in the inside too.

First of all, in his essay the student does not identify what character traits of the protagonist Pip he is going to analyze. Instead, he summarizes the life of the protagonist Pip. In the first paragraph he describes Pip as the most well known character, and that the story revolves around Pip and his great expectations. Next, in the second paragraph the student describes the early life or childhood of Pip--his family background and how he meets the convict. Then, in the third and last paragraphs he points out the

transition in Pip's later life, from being selfish and inconsiderate to coming to grips with his reality, knowing that his benefactor is actually the convict, and to understanding what happiness is. This is a clear and nice summary. However, summarizing is not what the assignment is all about.

The writer does not do what he is asked to; that is, analyzing the character traits of his chosen personality. Thus, what he does is noticeably irrelevant to what the paper is supposed to be about. This paper, then, violates the maxim of Relation: be relevant. And as discussed, a coherent discourse is one that is consistent with content, purpose, voice, and style. We can say that this paper is incoherent because its content is neither relevant nor consistent with the purpose of the paper assigned.

(7) Great Expectations

Estella Havisham is a character in Charles Dickens', Great Expectations, who's cold-heartedness is in contrast to her honesty. Miss Havisham, the adopted mother of Estella, rears her into a cold-hearted person; however, despite her upbringing, she develops an honesty that is unrecognized by Miss Havisham and Pip.

One day, Pip was invited to Miss Havisham's house. When Pip and Estella were introduced, and told by Miss Havisham to play cards together, Estella responded rudely. "With this boy! Why, he is a common laboring-boy!" And to Pip's surprise Miss Havisham answered, "Well? You can break his heart." Pip succumbs to this behavior as the book progresses, and eventually falls in love with Estella.

The contrast with Estella's characteristics is evident later in the book. After Pip hears that Estella is preparing to marry Drummle, he goes to visit her. When Pip proclaims his life-long love for Estella, she responds honestly.

"On whom should I fling myself away?" .."Should I fling myself away upon the man who would the soonest feel (if people do feel such things) than I took nothing to him? There! It is done. I shall do well enough, and so will my husband. As to leading me into this fatal step, Miss Havisham would have had me wait, and not marry yet; but I am willing enough to change it. Say no more we shall never understand each other."

Again, the fact that Miss Havisham and Pip could not see past Estella's lack of feeling and emotion, confirms the extreme contrast in these two character traits. Pip truly believed that, as a woman, Estella could love him, and that her days of treating him badly

were behind them. Miss Havisham realized the detriment of her hatred. Moreover, the significance of the character, Estella, seems to be the corruption that occurs when a good person is subjected to a life of hate. She was born to a murderess and a convict, and saved by a rich, but bitter woman.

In the first paragraph, the writer identifies the characteristic traits of Estella as cold-hearted and yet honest. She gives a clear description of what she means by her cold-heartedness. This trait is revealed, according to the writer, when Estella responds to Miss Havisham's request to play cards with Pip. Estella exclaims, "With this boy! Why, he is a common laboring-boy!"

There is a breach of the maxim of Relation, be relevant, in the second paragraph. In the last sentence of the second paragraph, when the writer explains that "Pip succumbs to this behavior as the book progresses, and eventually falls in love with Estella," she violates the Relation maxim. The statement about Pip above is not pertinent to the topic idea, namely, the description of Estella's cold-heartedness and honesty.

In the third paragraph, the writer shows a convincing example of the other trait of Estella, honesty. However, in the fourth paragraph the writer stumbles again in making her description of Estella's traits relevant to the topic idea.

Instead of addressing Estella's character traits, cold-heartedness and honesty, she digresses by discussing other characters in the story, Miss Havisham and Pip. This again creates a violation of the Relation maxim.

The lack of focus and relevance of the writer's fourth paragraph violates the Relation maxim. All the sentences of the fourth paragraph bear no relevance to Estella's traits. In summary, the whole essay is incoherent because the writer juxtaposes numerous unrelated ideas, which neither support her descriptions about Estella's cold-heartedness and honesty nor are relevant to the focus or purpose of her paper, an analysis of Estella's character traits.

We have seen from the seven examples of student writing analyzed in this chapter that the coherence of a text is, in part, determined by whether the text follows the rules of the *Cooperative Principle*. So it is important for teachers to make their students take into consideration the rules of the *Cooperative Principle* in order to communicate effectively with readers. And for this reason, in the next chapter I shall present some suggestions on how to help students apply the knowledge of the *Cooperative Principle* to improve the quality and communication level of their writing.

CHAPTER FIVE

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Surely every composition teacher has encountered students whose writing is difficult to understand because it lacks coherence. These students write pieces of ideas that are disconnected and paragraphs that are disorganized. As Anita Brostoff notes, "The worst cases, clearly, are produced by writers who have trouble thinking in basic, logical patterns" (279). She calls the kind of prose that these writers produce "pathologic writing," which stands for unconnected prose where "the relationship between any two successive sentences are non-existent, superficial, or merely personal, and where no semantic thread holds together a sequence of sentences" (279). Another composition theorist, Linda Flower, calls this kind of essay, "writer-based" prose. That is, it retains an egocentric focus, orders ideas with a narrative framework or merely lists them randomly in a survey form, and relies on words and phrases that are personally related to the writer's individual experience but not necessarily accessible to readers (35). These are principally the characteristics that occurred frequently in the compositions I studied (chapter four).

Like other complex problems, however, incoherence can in some measure yield to analysis; and if we can define and analyze it, we can begin to deal with it. In order to help

writers with difficulties in writing coherently, we should try not only to identify specific areas of weakness but also to investigate causes. There are at least five main factors that contribute to the lack of coherence in the eight essays analyzed in this thesis. First, these writers have not yet discovered the main point they wished to make about their subjects; in other words, they are unable to identify the topic idea. Second, they have not yet fully understood the relationships among the ideas; their essays are merely repeating ideas instead of elaborating them. Third, they do not make the relationships among these ideas clear and relevant to the focus and purpose of the paper. Fourth, they do not arrange the ideas in a clear, logical order. Fifth, they do not give readers necessary information about their topics and organize the details adequately; the information presented is either overly or insufficiently detailed.

Now we come to the most important question: how can knowledge of the theory of the *Cooperative Principle* help students to write coherently as they attempt to express their ideas in writing. Can we teach the *Cooperative Principle* concepts without having to make them too complicated for the students? (I need to emphasize, however, that based on my study, I do not see how I can apply the Quality maxim ("say only what you believe to be true") to writing, in particular to the analysis of coherence. Nevertheless, the maxims of Quantity, Relation, and Manner

will prove useful in clarifying coherence problems for students. For this reason, I would not suggest that teachers use these maxims in teaching coherence).

Before we can answer the questions above we need to remember two things. First, in the beginning of writing instruction, it is important for teachers to emphasize that students formulate a clear and precise topic idea on what they are going to write. Second, I do not suggest that we teach students the *Cooperative Principle* theory simply because telling students that their writing violates the maxims of the *Cooperative Principle* might just confuse them even more. The concepts of the *Cooperative Principle* discussed here are only for helping teachers understand, identify, and explain the causes of incoherence in their students' writing. Nevertheless, we can certainly find some way to teach the basic principles of the four maxims.

One way to make students realize that their writing violates the first maxim, Quantity, without having to tell them about the maxim itself, is by pointing at a problem paragraph and telling the students that the information presented in that paragraph is insufficient. Students then need to supply the information missing. A paragraph can also be overly detailed. In this case, students need to make their contribution of information as concise as possible and to give readers only the necessary information. Composition teachers can also explain the violation of the third maxim,

Relation, by describing to the students that some of their paragraphs contain irrelevant information, that ideas are unrelated to the topic ideas, and that the subject of their writing is not consistent with the focus and purpose of the paper. The last maxim, Manner, can be taught by showing students that some of their sentences in the paragraph do not make any sense. Teachers can ask students to organize ideas in a clear, orderly, and logical manner so that readers can understand what message they are trying to convey without difficulty. All these teaching activities can be done with the help of overhead projectors or by distributing copies of samples of incoherent writing to students and explaining why and how the texts are incoherent. Teachers can also have students sit in groups and assign them to analyze aspects of incoherence in their peers' writing or other writing exercises given by teachers using the guidelines of the *Cooperative Principle's* maxims. This kind of exercise may well be fun as well as challenging for students.

Finally, through the application of the knowledge of the *Cooperative Principle*, students will also be able to write "effective essays" rather than just "grammatically correct essays." Effective essays are ones that guide readers along coherent lines of thought and build, step by step, on shared knowledge to enlarge their readers' understanding.

The theory of the *Cooperative Principle* designates a combination of form and concepts; taught and used well, it forces writers to adjust the structures of their discourse to the demands of the ideas they want to express so that the reader can process them with greater ease. This constant awareness makes writing, as well the teaching of writing, what it should be: not just an exercise in syntactic orderliness, but an attempt to communicate.

CONCLUSION

In Judgement and Reasoning in the Child, one of the world's most renowned psychologists and educators, Jean Piaget, discusses changes in types of reasoning from early to late childhood. Piaget explains that young children go through several developmental stages, from having no ability to think logically at the preoperational stage to achieving the ability to think abstractly at the formal operational level (15). Before reaching the formal operational level, children have difficulty seeing the relationships between things around them and they are unable to perceive causality (let alone more sophisticated reactions). Their inability to make connections is seen in the fact that they juxtapose unrelated ideas. As Piaget puts it, "Successive judgements are not connected by explicit relations but are simply stuck together" (17). Furthermore, young children's minds are still egocentric: they fail to realize that others may have points of view different from their own (Piaget 17). Young children believe that others see things as they themselves do and that others therefore completely understand and agree with them. They see no need to prove their statements to others, no need for logical justification (18). I can say that there is logical connection between this Piaget's theory with the tendencies of the student writers in my analysis in chapter three.

It appears that for many people this childish thinking process can remain in even later years when they become adults. I believe part of the problem that I find in the writing of these students originates from the habits of thinking in the same way as younger children do. I am not suggesting that all these writers are immature and childish. They may be adults in the respect that they perform their daily activities and duties as responsible persons, but they are not mentally well-prepared and well-trained to think in an orderly, organized, and logical way. This inability is certainly carried out in the way they write and describe their thoughts in writing. Not only does their writing exhibit a great deal of redundancy, but it also appears to lack in part the ability to perceive and articulate abstract concepts with reference to particular instances, to perceive relationships among ideas, and to reach beyond the worlds of their immediate experience. The above factors I believe are the reasons why many basic writers fail to write coherently. And as I have suggested in chapter four, one of the most effective steps that a composition teacher can take to help his students to write coherently--producing a text whose ideas are connected, whose information flow is smooth, and whose voice and style are congruent--is to teach them the maxims of the *Cooperative Principle*.

It is not my suggestion at all that students be taught linguistics such as phonology to gain insight into some

types of spelling problems or morphology and semantics to improve their diction, nor should be they be taught the details of each violation of the maxims of *Cooperative Principle*. I must emphasize that linguistically informed composition instruction is not instruction in linguistics. The *Cooperative Principle* can help provide writing teachers with analytical tools for understanding how language works and why some texts fail. Without linguistic knowledge, the teacher either would have to rely merely on prescriptive rules, which consequently focus on grammatical rules. In this case, the teacher risks becoming an uncritical supporter of convention, asserting rules (such as "Avoid clichés!" or "Never use the passive!") which are ignored frequently in good writing. Linguistics assures teachers of immediate and routine access to rules and thus facilitates their understanding of language problems.

In "Cohesion, Coherence Patterns, and EFL Essay Evaluation," Lindeberg suggests that "...the difference between essays impressionistically graded as good and poor does not lie in the number of cohesive ties between sentences, but rather in the ways propositions link into arguments" (Connor and Johns 22). So as we refer back to Halliday and Hasan's analyses of cohesion, I suggest that analyses of cohesion may be potentially useful in distinguishing between stages of writing development; however, by emphasizing cohesion alone, we cannot deal with

a very important question, one that concerns writing quality. The quality or "success" of a piece of writing depends a great deal on factors outside the text itself. Such factors lie beyond the scope of cohesion analyses. As Connor and Johns put it "...and, so far at least, no grammar, dictionary, or study of cohesive links between sentences has succeeded in drawing a line between what is interpretable and what is not" (26).

Finally, I hope this thesis will contribute insight to the teaching of coherence and stimulate further interest in making linguistics a *sine qua non* of the study of composition and rhetoric.

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